

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 917

FL 018 888

AUTHOR Fahmy, Jane Jackson; Bilton, Linda
TITLE University Language Policy: Identifying Student Attitudes.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the World Congress of Applied Linguistics (9th, Thessaloniki, Greece, April 15-21, 1990) sponsored by the International Association of Applied Linguistics.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Policy; College Freshmen; English (Second Language); *English for Science and Technology; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Language Attitudes; *Language of Instruction; Language Planning; Language Proficiency; *Language Role; *School Policy; School Surveys; Second Language Instruction; Sociocultural Patterns; *Student Attitudes; Student Characteristics; Student Motivation
IDENTIFIERS *Sultan Qaboos University (Oman)

ABSTRACT

A survey of 376 first-year Arab university students at Sultan Qaboos University (Oman) investigated attitudes about the use of English as a medium for instruction in science and technology. Questionnaires elicited information about student language background, reasons for studying English, patterns of present and future use of English, and attitudes toward self, native language group, target language group, and English as the language of instruction. Students' English language proficiency levels were determined with the Comprehensive English Language Test. Attitudinal variables and proficiency scores were correlated and analyzed with relation to the university's language policy. Results indicate that student attitudes are compatible with school policy. For most students, English is simply a means for obtaining scientific and technological information, and they show little interest in Western culture. However, it is suggested that as students progress through the program, contact with English-speakers will increase and student interest in the social dimension of English may be kindled. A longitudinal study to monitor changes in attitudes and language proficiency is recommended to assist in planning for language policy and instruction. (MSE)

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ED324917

UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE POLICY:
IDENTIFYING STUDENT ATTITUDES

by

Dr. Jane Jackson Fahmy
City University of New York
New York City, N.Y., U.S.

&

Linda Bilton
University of Southampton
Southampton, U.K.

A paper to be presented at the
9th World Congress of Applied Linguistics
(AILA) in Thessaloniki, Greece in April, 1990.

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ABSTRACT

When designing and implementing a language policy, the sociocultural context should be taken into account. Such factors as the roles and status of the target language and mother tongue can have an important influence on the learners' attitudes towards the learning situation. For instance, the introduction of English as a medium of instruction in a foreign language setting can be a particularly sensitive issue and attention must be paid to the attitudes of the students who are confronted with the additional task of mastering the subject matter in another language. A sociolinguistic study has therefore been undertaken in a new Middle Eastern university which has adopted English as the language of instruction for Science and Technology.

The subjects in the study were 376 first year Arab university students at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. The measures used to assess attitudes and motivations were modelled after questionnaires by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Spolsky (1969). The information collected dealt with these topics:

- 1) the language background of the students
 - 2) their reasons for studying English
 - 3) the pattern of their present and future use of English
 - 4) their attitudes toward self, the native language group, the target language group and English as the medium of instruction.
- The students' level of proficiency in English was established by means of the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT), (Harris and Palmer, 1986). Attitudinal variables were then related to CELT scores and results analyzed within the framework of the SQU language policy.

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the importance of sociocultural factors in language planning.

In the last three decades, a small number of researchers have investigated the relationship between language proficiency and cultural attitudes and have found it necessary to consider the social milieu where the language learning is taking place. The social-psychological model of second language learning, recognizes the importance of cultural beliefs in influencing attitudes relevant to language acquisition in a given context. Included in the social context are the sociolinguistic situation, the exposure of learners to other languages, the roles of the target language and other languages in the community, and the perception of the value of the target language (Spolsky, 1988). When designing and implementing a language policy, these factors must be borne in mind.

A sociolinguistic study was undertaken at Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman to examine the relations between cultural attitudes and attained proficiency in EFL. This paper discusses the SQU study within the framework of the university language policy.

Literature Review

Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) were among the first to look at the relationship between achievement in a second language

and such social-psychological variables as attitudes and motivation. In their 1972 book, Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning, they introduced two terms to characterize different orientations toward learning a second language:

The orientation is ... instrumental ... if the purposes of language study are ... utilitarian..., such as getting ahead in one's occupation... In contrast, the orientation is integrative if the student wishes to learn more about the other cultural community because he is interested in ... eventually being accepted as a member of that other group (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, p.3).

Gardner and Lambert's early studies led them to conclude that where language learning was a form of enrichment, as in the case of most language programmes in North America, integrative motivation produced better results.

However, a later study in the Philippines demonstrated that certain attitudinal dimensions are closely tied to the particular cultural context. For example, they found that Filipino students who were instrumentally motivated were successful in developing a high proficiency in English (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Lukmani (1972) also found that English language proficiency correlated significantly with instrumental motivation when she tested high school students in India.

In the late 1970's, Oller and his colleagues (Oller et al., 1977, 1978; Chihara & Oller, 1978) conducted a series of investigations using an attitude questionnaire similar to those used by Spolsky (1969) and Gardner and Lambert (1972). In their first study involving Chinese graduate students in the United

states, they found that a positive attitude toward self and members of the native language group resulted in higher scores on a test of English proficiency. However, a later study with Japanese adults studying at a YMCA in Japan, showed weak correlations between attitudinal variables and attained EFL proficiency. One explanation offered for the contrasting results was the difference between a foreign and a second language context of learning.

The varying results of the foregoing studies lead one to suppose that context could well be an important factor affecting attitudes to language learning. Spolsky (1988) stresses the importance of the influence of social context on language learning, and as early as 1972, Gardner and Lambert recommended replication of their studies in different contexts for the purpose of cross-cultural comparisons. However, very few such studies have been carried out in developing countries despite the spread of English as a world language. A large scale study has therefore been undertaken in the Sultanate of Oman to investigate the relationship between attitudes and language proficiency in such a context, with the following research questions being addressed:

- 1) To what extent are subjects integratively or instrumentally motivated towards the English language and English people?
- 2) What is the magnitude of the correlation between attitude measures and language proficiency?

SQU Study

Setting

Formal education was not introduced in the Sultanate of Oman until the early 1970's, rather later than in the other Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC) states, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Birks & Sinclair, 1987; Smith, 1983a). The educational policy of all of these countries has been formulated by the "Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States" (AREGS). This governing body has published guidelines for the teaching of the English language and culture in the schools, including the following goals in the affective domain:

The pupil should:

1. develop a positive attitude towards learning English as a target language, to the extent that it does not affect his positive attitude towards Arabic.
2. be aware of additional basic characteristics of English culture, in addition to those of Arabic and Islamic culture.
3. be willing to enjoy listening to English spoken in different modes (songs, dialogues, speeches, etc.) and reading for pleasure, in addition to enjoying listening to Arabic spoken in the same modes and others.
4. find pleasure in discovering new means of reading and listening to English (and Arabic).
5. be willing to learn more names of English places and people, in addition to Arab and Islamic names of places and people.
6. be willing to use English as another means of communication (in addition to Arabic).
7. acquire reasonable understanding of the native speakers of English on condition that it does not

create a negative attitude towards the pupil's Arab/Islamic culture.

8. have continuing interest in reading English books and periodicals that deal with various subjects, with special interest in Arabic and Islamic topics.

9. enjoy constantly increasing variety of good English; dramatic and other programmes on the radio, television, etc., especially on Arab and Islamic topics.

10. be able to express, in speech or in writing, the beliefs, values, etc. acquired from the English and Arab/Islamic culture. (Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, 1983).

These goals express the concern of the ABEGS to preserve the Arabic language and Islamic culture, while improving the English language proficiency of the students.

In 1977 the Omani government established the Education and Training Council to refine and implement the Gulf educational policy in the Sultanate. It is chaired by the Sultan and has eleven members, of whom eight are ministers (Birks & Sinclair, 1987). The council is particularly concerned with promoting "Omanisation"; that is, the replacement of non-Omani workers by nationals. The specific objective of the council is to plan "an education and training system which will produce the correct types of national school leaver in the correct numbers, to match the future requirements for Omani workers" (Birks & Sinclair, p.166).

In order to meet the most urgent manpower needs of the country, Sultan Qaboos University was opened in 1986. It was set up as a technical institution with English as the medium of instruction in the Colleges of Medicine, Engineering, Science,

and Agriculture. In preparation, several studies were carried out in the early 1980's to ascertain the language learning background of the prospective university students (Al-Barwani, 1983; Bint, 1982; Smith, 1983a, 1983b, 1984). It was found that the overall language proficiency of Omani secondary students was poor, concluding that "even the very best need several hundred hours of additional English before they can cope with English-medium tertiary level studies" (Smith, 1983a, p.29). This has been partly attributed to the inadequate training of their ELT teachers and poor motivation due to lack of contact with English outside of the classroom (Al-Barwani, 1983; Al-Lamki, 1989; Bint, 1982).

It was necessary to take these local features into account when planning the language centre at SQU (Smith, 1984). In addition, the courses had to be set up to comply with the university language policy as determined by the Governing Council. It is reflected in the following address by His Excellency Yahiya Al-Manthri, the current Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Education.

... the inculcation of Islamic values, intellectual discipline and character building will be emphasized, along with the acquisition of academic and professional qualifications. While moving into a modern age, Oman does not wish to lose its special identity, based on long-standing traditions and the Islamic way of life. Young Omanis suddenly faced with the challenges of a modern complicated world must be equipped to cope with the demands of a changing society and the impact of the outside world without detriment to their heritage and the values of their Islamic society (Al-Manthri, 1984, p.11).

This clearly shows the envisaged role of English at SOU primarily as a means of conveying scientific and technological information, without the transmission of other aspects of Western culture (e.g. see the SFC Steering Committee Report, 1989).

As well as influencing formal education, the social context determines opportunities for informal language learning. These are very limited in Oman. In fact, entry to the country is strictly controlled so that most visitors are businessmen, diplomats, or members of specially arranged tour groups who have little contact with the local population. Expatriate workers and their families are based almost exclusively in the capital area, not in the interior where most SOU students come from. Therefore, there is almost no possibility for students to make friends with English people. For many, their first contact with a native English speaker is with their university lecturers in a formal setting. These distinctive features of the Omani context must be borne in mind when interpreting the results of the SOU study.

Method

Subjects. All first year students enrolled in the Science Foundation program at Sultan Qaboos University participated in this study. These students planned to major in science, agriculture, engineering, or medicine.

Materials. Student proficiency was measured by the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT), an intermediate-level test developed by Harris and Palmer (1986). The listening section (40 mins.) measured their ability to comprehend short statements,

questions, and dialogues as spoken by native-speakers of English, while the structure (50 mins.) section measured their ability to use grammatical forms. Measures of achievement at SQU consisted of mid-semester English and Science examination results.

By means of a questionnaire, information was gathered about the Ss' sex, language spoken at home, years of EFL study, and length of time spent in an English-speaking country. In addition, subjects were asked to rate themselves and their parents on five-point scales for understanding, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English.

A modified version of the attitude questionnaire used by Oller and his associates (1977) was translated into Arabic. All of the direct questions (adapted from Gardner and Lambert 1972) required a response on a five-point scale rating the importance of reasons for learning English. Reasons could be roughly divided into instrumental or integrative motives (Gardner, 1975).

The indirect questions were in the form of four identity scales adapted from Spolsky (1969). The scales consisted of adjectives such as "competitive", "friendly", "clever", etc. Subjects were asked to indicate how well each of thirty adjectives described themselves, their ideal selves, Omanis, and English people.

Procedure. Mid-way through the first semester, the subjects were administered the CELT. Over the next two weeks, they also wrote SQU mid-semester examinations in English and Science and filled in the attitude questionnaire. All testing was carried out

simultaneously during regular class periods with groups ranging in size from 25 to 30.

Results and Discussion

Subjects. There were 131 female and 245 male first-year Science students involved in the study for a total of 376. Approximately 84% indicated that they spoke Arabic at home, while the rest spoke either Gebali, Swahili, Lawati, or Belushi, alone or in combination with Arabic. On the average Ss had studied EFL for 9.2 years. The vast majority (92.2%) had never visited an English-speaking country. 6.8% had visited for less than a year and only 1.9% had spent more than a year in an English environment.

Table 1 gives the means and standard deviations of the various measures of EFL proficiency and related variables while Table 2 reports their intercorrelations. The scores on the listening and structure sections of the CELT were averaged together to provide a measure of the students' overall proficiency in English. Using a standard deviation of 10.00, the CELT scores were divided into three bands of low, average, and high. Their SQU achievement scores were grouped in a similar manner and to facilitate the analysis, the bands were coded 1 = low, 2 = average and 3 = high. The mean score on the CELT was 1.90 with a standard deviation of .75. The results on the SQU courses were slightly higher with an average of 1.99 ($S=.78$) for English and 2.04 ($S=.83$) for Science. The CELT proficiency test

was highly correlated with the SQU English score (+.58) and Science score (+.37).

Using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "like a native speaker", on average the Ss rated their reading skill the highest at 2.90 with a standard deviation of .64, followed by understanding at 2.73 ($S=.57$), writing at 2.70 ($S=.66$) and speaking 2.34 ($S=.62$). Their self-ratings of EFL proficiency correlated significantly with the CELT scores ($p<.001$), although the students appear to have over-rated their reading ability. Using the same five-point scale, the Ss rated their mother's English at an average of 1.26 ($S=.85$) and the father's at 1.75 ($S=1.21$). The CELT scores correlated significantly with the father's proficiency level at .27 and with the mother's at .19 ($p<.001$).

In the few cases where the students had spent time in an English-speaking country, it is very interesting to note the significant positive correlation between this variable and the CELT score (.34) as well as with their rating of their speaking skill (.34) and parents' skills (.37 and .35).

Means and standard deviations of each of the direct attitude questions relating to reasons for learning English are given in Table 3. The ones judged most important were "required to study English at SQU", "to be a well-educated person", and "to read scientific textbooks and journals in English". All of these represent clearly instrumental motives. In contrast, the following integrative reasons were rated the least important: "to

7

visit an English-speaking country" and "to make friends among English-speaking people". This is not surprising considering the students' limited opportunities to integrate in any way with English people.

The data in Table 4 show the results of the indirect questions (the Identity scales). Positively valued traits were ones that Ss indicated they would like to have more of (e.g. a comparison of columns one and three shows that "modest", "intellectual", and "happy" are considered positive attributes. Negatively valued traits, on the other hand, are those which Ss indicated they would like to have less of (e.g. "stubborn", "nervous", "sensitive", and "shy"). Once the value of a trait was known to be positive or negative, it was possible to compare mean ratings of English people against mean ratings of Omanis to determine the degree of integrative orientation of the Ss toward English people. An overall measure of degree of integrativeness was determined by counting the number of positively valued traits or negatively valued traits where English people contrasted favorably (indicated by a + in the last column of Table 4) or unfavorably (indicated by a -) with Omanis.

English people were rated more favorably than Omanis on only 7 scales (they were rated more "economical", "practical", "up-to-date", and "well-organized", and less "nervous", "sensitive", and "shy"). In contrast, Omanis were rated more favorably on 19 scales. They were judged to be more "modest", "helpful", "broad-minded", "polite", "kind", "clever", "efficient", "considerate",

7

"conservative", "reasonable", "successful", "cooperative", "friendly", "calm", "sincere", "dependable", "happy", "logical", and less "stubborn". There was no difference in the scales for "confident", "competitive", "intellectual" and "optimistic". The greatest contrasts were on the variables of "helpful", "kind", "conservative", "friendly", "dependable", and "shy". English people were judged to be much less "conservative" (+ 1.2 in the last column of Table 4) and also much less "shy" (+ 1.2). They were also considered to be significantly less "helpful" (+1.0), "kind" (+1.0), "friendly" (+1.0), and "dependable" (+1.0).

The contrasts between ratings of English people and Omanis (summarized in the last column of Table 4) may be interpreted as indicating that on the whole Ss in this study were not integratively oriented toward the target language group since they tended to rate Omanis higher on desirable personal traits, though they do appear to be positively (instrumentally) oriented toward English people with respect to some achievement traits. This supports the findings of the direct attitude measures.

Weak correlations were found between attained EFL proficiency and both direct and indirect attitude measures. In fact, in some cases where positive correlations might have been expected, negative or insignificant correlations were observed. For example, Ss with high proficiency were not more integratively oriented toward English and English people. This does not negate Gardner and Lambert's (1972) contention that integrative motivation is desirable for progress in second language learning,

it may simply reflect the lack of exposure to the target culture. However, it does show that the few students who have learned English successfully have done so for instrumental reasons. In this respect, it supports the findings of Lukmani (1972) in India and Gardner and Lambert's (1972) study in the Philippines.

Recommendations

The SQU study shows that at present the students' attitudes towards the English language and culture harmonize with the SQU Language Policy. For most, English is simply a means to obtain scientific and technological information and they show little interest in western culture. However, as they progress through the university, they will meet more and more English-speaking lecturers and begin to do field work with western personnel at petroleum companies, hospitals, or geological organizations, etc. This contact may kindle an interest in the social dimension of English. In fact, students in the Science Foundation Course are already beginning to demand that their program be supplemented by more general English language courses to improve their conversation skills.

Therefore, there is an obvious need for a longitudinal study to monitor changes in both attitudes and language proficiency. The subjects of the present research should, for example, be retested in their final year at university and the information gathered should be channelled back into the SQU language policy. The university staff, both English language instructors and

academic professors, should then become more aware and sensitized to their ss' level of English, expectations, and attitudes towards the learning situation at the different stages of the country's development. This should help the SQU language planners develop language programs that are more culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations on Various Measures of EFL Proficiency, SQU achievement scores, and time spent in an English-speaking country

Measures	M	S
EFL Proficiency		
*CELT	1.90	.75
Achievement (SQU)		
*English	1.99	.78
*Science	2.04	.83
Self Ratings		
**Understanding	2.73	.57
**Speaking	2.34	.62
**Reading	2.90	.64
**Writing	2.70	.66
Parents' English		
**Mother	1.26	.85
**Father	1.75	1.21
***Time in an English-Speaking Country	1.09	.32

*On a three-point scale where 1 = "low", 2 = "average", and 3 = "high".

**On a five-point scale ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "like a native speaker".

***On a three point scale where 1 = "none", 2 = "less than a year", and 3 = "more than a year".

Table 2

Intercorrelations between the EFL proficiency test (CELT), SQU achievement scores, self-ratings of EFL proficiency and time spent in an English-speaking country

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
EFL Proficiency										
1.CELT	1.00	.58	.37	.33	.34	.18	.29	.19	.27	.34
Achievement										
2.English		1.00	.58	.28	.25	.10	.21	.10	.08	.24
3.Science			1.00	.21	.17	.07	.09	.09	.18	.18
Self-Ratings										
4.Understanding				1.00	.45	.39	.46	.27	.21	.21
5.Speaking					1.00	.33	.43	.25	.24	.34
6.Reading						1.00	.50	.14	.13	.15
7.Writing							1.00	.15	.14	.23
Parent's English										
8.Mother								1.00	.47	.37
9.Father									1.00	.35
10. Time spent in an English-speaking country										1.00

* Correlations in this table of 0.15 to 0.18 are significant at $p < .01$ and above 0.18 they are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 3

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on Direct Attitude Questions (n=318).

*Reasons for Learning English	M	S
1. required to study English at SQU	4.1	1.2
2. to be a well-educated person	4.0	1.1
3. to read scientific textbooks and journals in English	3.6	1.2
4. to better understand English people and their way of life	3.4	1.4
5. to read English for pleasure	3.3	1.3
6. to get a good job	3.1	1.4
7. for personal satisfaction	2.9	1.5
8. to watch English t.v. programs, videos or films	2.6	1.3
9. to study in an English-medium institution abroad	2.5	1.6
10. because I have English-speaking friends	2.5	1.3
11. to work with an international organization	2.1	1.4
12. to visit an English-speaking country	2.0	1.1
13. to make friends among English-speaking people	2.0	1.2
14. to please my family	1.7	1.2

*On a five-point scale ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "most important".

Table 4

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on Indirect Identity Scales.

	<u>Self</u>		<u>Ideal</u>		<u>Omanis</u>		<u>English</u>		English minus Omanis
	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	
1.modest	3.7	.8	4.5	.7	3.9	.9	3.0	.9	-.9
2.helpful	3.9	.8	4.6	.6	4.1	.9	3.1	1.0	-1.0
3.economical	2.8	.9	3.5	.9	3.0	1.0	3.8	1.0	+.8
4.confident	3.6	.9	4.4	.7	3.7	.9	3.7	.9	0
5.competitive	3.4	1.1	4.0	1.0	3.6	1.0	3.6	1.0	0
6.broad-minded	3.4	.9	4.3	.7	3.6	1.0	3.4	1.0	-.2
7.intellectual	3.3	1.0	4.4	.8	3.5	1.0	3.5	.9	0
8.polite	4.2	.9	4.6	.7	4.2	.8	3.3	1.1	-.9
9.optimistic	3.6	1.0	4.3	.9	3.7	.8	3.7	1.0	0
10.practical	3.5	.9	4.4	.7	3.6	1.0	4.1	.9	+.5
*11.stubborn	2.6	1.3	1.9	1.1	2.5	1.3	2.8	1.2	+.3
12.kind	4.1	.9	4.2	.8	3.8	1.0	2.8	1.0	-1.0
13.clever	3.1	.8	4.4	.7	3.7	1.0	3.4	.9	-.3
14.efficient	3.5	.8	4.5	.6	4.0	.8	3.3	.9	-.7
15.considerate	3.6	.9	4.2	.7	3.6	.9	3.1	1.0	-.5
16.conservative	4.0	.9	4.4	.8	4.1	.9	2.9	1.2	+1.2
*17.nervous	2.6	1.2	1.6	.9	2.6	1.2	2.5	1.1	+.1
*18.sensitive	3.7	1.1	2.8	1.1	3.3	1.0	2.8	1.1	+.5
19.reasonable	3.6	.7	4.0	.8	3.6	.8	3.1	.9	-.5
20.successful	3.6	.7	4.6	.6	3.9	.8	3.7	.8	-.2
21.cooperative	4.0	.8	4.6	.6	4.2	.9	3.3	1.0	-.9
22.friendly	3.8	.8	4.2	.8	3.9	.9	2.9	1.0	-1.0
23.calm	3.6	1.0	3.9	.9	3.5	1.0	3.1	1.0	-.4
24.sincere	4.1	.7	4.7	.6	4.2	.8	3.3	1.0	-.9
25.up-to-date	3.3	.8	3.7	.9	3.4	.9	4.1	1.0	+.7
26.dependable	3.8	.8	4.6	.6	4.1	.8	3.1	1.1	-1.0
27.well-organized	3.6	.9	4.5	.7	3.6	1.0	3.8	1.0	+.2
28.happy	3.4	1.0	4.2	.8	3.7	.9	3.3	1.0	-.4
29.logical	3.5	.8	4.2	.8	3.6	.9	3.3	.9	-.3
*30.shy	3.2	1.1	2.4	1.1	2.8	1.2	1.6	.8	+1.2

* negatively-valued traits

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Date Filmed

March 29, 1991